

Abstracts



Barriers and opportunities for sexual health services for key populations in the Dominican Republic: provider, government, and community-leader perspectives

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Abstract

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Background Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are an important health issue in developing countries. Key populations, including people living with HIV, men who have sex with men, trans women, transactional sex workers, pregnant adolescents, and migrants, are at high risk of STIs and have barriers to sexual health services. In this study, we aim to understand capacities and barriers to access for key populations in the Dominican Republic, and to identify opportunities to improve services.

Methods We used purposive sampling to solicit views from stakeholders in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, including health-care agencies, community-based organisations, and government entities that guide STI screening policy. We conducted 19 semi-structured interviews between February, 2015, and May, 2015, with: nine health providers, seven community leaders, and three government authorities, asking questions about STI services for key populations, gaps in services, and barriers to access. Comprehensive notes and audio recordings were iteratively reviewed by two investigators to define barriers and opportunities for STI screening.

Findings Respondents identified barriers to access at individual, community, organisational, and policy levels. Individual barriers include poor risk perception and health knowledge, drug use in transactional sex workers and trans women, inability to negotiate condom use in sex worker and adolescent groups, and poverty. Community barriers include: discrimination against sex workers, trans women, people living with HIV, men who have sex with men, and migrants; and a culture of self-medicating in all populations. Organisational barriers include a lack of centres offering STI testing, unavailability of medications in centres accessed by key population, and poor knowledge of available resources in the community. Policy barriers include poor access to insurance in populations; low resource allocation to STIs, other than HIV; and inconsistent supply of materials and funds. Despite these barriers, local organisations that work with key populations expressed interest in increasing capacity to screen and treat STIs.

Interpretation There are many barriers to STI services for key populations in the Dominican Republic. Community-based organisations working with such populations could leverage their expertise to increase STI awareness, screening, and treatment. Our findings can help generate sustainable interventions to reduce the burden of STIs in these key populations.

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Declaration of interests

We declare no competing interests.